

## "Dear Mr. President", Nashville, Tennessee, January or February 1942

**AFS 6444A**

Unidentified Man: Well, Mr. Gilchreist. Don't you think that the spirit that is demonstrated as to the treatment of Negroes now right in the southland can foster fertile ground for the various isms that are. And don't you think that if the higher-ups would do all that was in their power to get those people in the South, with which we have to live, to work along with us and become neighborly and more brotherly, that we could and would feel more disposed to do our upmost towards winning the war?

Mr. Gilchreist: I hardly agree with you there. I agree with you, but yet we, as I foresaid, we've got to fight. Now the happening in Missouri the other day that didn't do any good for the cause. They took a Negro out and lynched him. It looked like just now that they would be trying to do all they could to bring about better race relations. And I hate to see such things because I want us to win and I'm behind it. And even though that happened that don't change my mind any. I'm still behind it, but that puts a lot of people against it. I mean a lot of men that was speaking kind of in favor of it, colored people, they says "See there, that's just like — they done started and the war ain't over yet." And they go ahead and tell about instances that happened before in a town down south when a Negro came back home and they ran him off to [square (?)]. Told him to get home and pull that uniform on. No Negro could wear the United States uniform in that town, even though he'd been overseas and fought and bled for us.

Unidentified man: And speaking of incidents that happened that probably poisoned the minds of people. While quite a small child standing in front of the capital in the state of Tennessee, I saw an Armistice Day parade in 1919 in which all of the ROTCs of the various white schools — of course we had no ROTC in the Negro schools in Nashville — marched right up the streets with the soldiers who had been abroad and had a big welcome sign on the streets of Nashville welcoming the soldiers back home. When the Negro soldiers got to this welcoming sign they were asked to turn to their right and go down a block and come around. They weren't allowed to come under the sign. Now that thing stayed with me a long time, but it hasn't dampened my spirit to the extent that I don't want to do what I can for the betterment of my country during this crisis. But I do feel, as Mr. Thomas feels, that every effort should be made on the part of the higher-ups in the white race to get the Negro to cooperate a hundred percent. Even those who have been poisoned as I was when I was a small child.

Unidentified Man: Mr. Beesley, I want to ask you this. What's the attitude of the young high school boys toward the war? Are they anxious to go to war and get in the civilian industries?

Leslie W. Beesley: The majority of the boys ??? the army, but for some reason they want to go into the navy. And it has been my policy to tell them that if they wanted to give service to the country, by all means go into the armed forces in the army rather than into the navy, because so much discrimination is shown in the navy and they weren't allowed to progress.